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Chair: Ms. King ..... (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)
Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Ruiz Massieu

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Agenda item 137: Pattern of conferences (A/71/32, A/71/116 and A/71/549)

1. **Ms. Ayebi-Arthur** (Vice-Chair of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2016 (A/71/32), said that the report contained a draft resolution on the pattern of conferences and a draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2017, which were recommended for adoption by the General Assembly. The Committee on Conferences had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/71/116) together with the statistical data presented as supplementary information. The report of the Committee on Conferences offered a comprehensive summary of the discussions held on all items on its agenda. The annual substantive session of that Committee offered Member States an opportunity to engage with the management of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management on all matters relating to conference and documentation services with a view to providing direction, guidance and support to the Secretariat in carrying out its mandates.

2. Two seats on the Committee on Conferences from the Latin American and Caribbean States remained vacant, and a number of Member States had been represented as observers at its organizational and substantive sessions. The Committee on Conferences had reviewed the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2017 and had discussed a proposal to extend the time frame allotted for the Fifth Committee's deliberations at the second part of the Assembly's resumed session, in the light of past trends in conference service usage. As no agreement on the proposal had been reached, several delegations had reserved their right to raise the issue in other intergovernmental bodies.

3. The Committee on Conferences had reviewed the statistical data on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities at the four main duty stations and at the United Nations Conference Centre at the Economic Commission for Africa. In addition, the Chair of the Committee on Conferences had reported on her mandate to hold consultations with those intergovernmental bodies whose utilization factor had fallen below the 80 per cent benchmark over the previous three consecutive years, from 2013 to 2015. Consultations had been held in the first half of 2016 with the representatives of three New York-based bodies, which had focused on outlining measures to improve their respective utilization factors and encouraging them to prepare and adjust their programmes of work on the basis of previous patterns of recurring agenda items and timely cancellations, with a view to achieving optimal utilization.

4. The Committee on Conferences continued its efforts to improve utilization by consulting, either in person or in writing, with the Chairs of intergovernmental bodies that underutilized conference-servicing resources. It supported the Secretariat's proposal to monitor and report on trends in utilization based on a six-year cycle, with a view to providing feedback to all intergovernmental calendar bodies, particularly those that consistently underutilized conference resources. In that regard, all intergovernmental bodies were encouraged to review their meeting entitlements and to plan and adjust their programmes of work on the basis of their actual utilization of conference-servicing resources, with a view to enhancing efficiency. In response to General Assembly resolution 66/233, the Committee secretariat had again provided utilization reports to the secretariats of all calendar bodies before and immediately after each scheduled session, including those that had consistently underutilized conference resources, and had made suggestions on how to improve their utilization factor, taking into account client feedback that had actively been sought.

5. With respect to documents management, the Committee on Conferences had received from the Secretariat information on external factors contributing to the recurrent late submission of documents by author departments and on measures to improve their compliance with the deadlines for submitting slotted documents. Compliance with submission deadlines had improved over the years as a result of the inclusion of 90 per cent submission compliance as a performance indicator in the annual compacts between senior managers and the Secretary-General, and thanks to the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

6. The Committee on Conferences had discussed digitization of older United Nations documents, and the Department of Public Information had provided for Committee members a briefing on the status of the project and a tour of the digitization operation and archives. In its draft resolution, the Committee on Conferences requested the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to present a proposal for the digitization of older important United Nations documents for consideration by the General Assembly no later than at the main part of its seventy-first session, outlining, inter alia, the definition of important older United Nations documents, as well as the scope and estimated quantity, cost and time frame. It also requested the Secretary-General to seek additional voluntary contributions for the digitization.

7. On staffing, the Committee on Conferences requested the Secretary-General to make further concerted efforts to promote outreach through, inter alia, traineeships and internships, and to introduce innovative methods to increase awareness of the programmes, including through partnerships with Member States, relevant international organizations and language institutions in all regions, in particular in Africa and Latin America. It also requested further updates on the pilot project related to the outposting to Vienna of translators from the French Translation Service in New York, including on the quality of services, a cost-benefit analysis, information on workload sharing and lessons learned.

8. With respect to the improvement of facilities and accessibility, the Secretariat had informed the Committee on Conferences that extrabudgetary resources were required to provide accessible services, and that sign-language interpretation was provided under the regular budget only to sessions of two bodies relating to the rights of persons with disabilities. However, hearing and visually impaired persons could borrow equipment from the Accessibility Centre in New York. Lastly, the Committee on Conferences requested the Secretary-General to continue to address issues related to the accessibility of conference facilities as a matter of priority.

9. **Ms. Pollard** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/71/116), said that the report, which provided information on procedures and activities related to the pattern of conferences in the four main duty stations, contained a brief analytical overview; sections presenting the developments and results achieved in meetings management and documents management in 2015, together with cost-efficiency initiatives and cross-cutting issues; a set of conclusions, recommendations and proposed next steps; and statistical data, presented as supplementary information. She indicated a number of changes in the structure of the current report compared with the report submitted in 2015 (A/70/122), noting in particular that integrated global management was no longer discussed in a separate section, as it had become fully mainstreamed in the daily operations of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

10. The Secretariat had faced a number of challenges relating to conference management, including a 45 per cent increase, between 2010 and 2015, in the number of meetings serviced each year, and an accompanying 10 per cent surge in documentation, with particularly sharp rises, of 23 and 8 per cent, respectively, being recorded in 2015. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had also been tackling the worldwide dearth of qualified language professionals by working with select universities, increasing its training activities and exploring ways to update its recruitment tests to identify suitable candidates and meet future needs.

11. Efficiency gains were being pursued through a more proactive reduction of underutilization by calendar bodies of their allocated meeting services and by leveraging technology in documentation production, management and processing. In particular, the Secretariat sought to harness the potential of eLUNa, the computer-assisted and machine translation platform that had been developed in-house, within existing resources, and at the initiative and with the active participation of the Organization's own translation staff. The platform, which had garnered praise across the United Nations system, would contribute to facilitating documentation production and management in a context of increasing documentation demands.

12. The report introduced a new methodology for analysing utilization of conference-servicing resources based on an adjusted reporting cycle and a scope of

reporting that encompassed all calendar bodies across all duty stations, with a view to providing a fuller picture of conference resources utilization. In addition, in line with the integrated global management rule, meetings held away from established headquarters in 2015 had been serviced, to the extent possible, by staff from the geographically closest duty station rather than that at which the relevant body was headquartered. Globally, considerable improvements had been recorded in the key performance indicators of documents management in 2015, as evidenced by the Secretariat's increased compliance with processing deadlines and mandated issuance time frames compared with 2014.

13. External factors beyond the control of author entities had again prevented some documents from being submitted for processing within the mandated time frames, in particular those submitted for consideration by the Fifth Committee. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management had collaborated closely with the author departments and the secretariats of the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in order to project the issuance dates of all pre-session documents for the Fifth Committee based on their length, submission deadlines and historical consideration pattern. As a result of those efforts and the work of the language services, of the 95 reports slotted for the Fifth Committee's consideration at the main part of the Assembly's seventieth session, 60 had been issued six weeks before consideration. However, the continued unavailability of the Fifth Committee's programme of work before the beginning of the main part of the session posed a challenge that must be overcome to enable the Department to formulate an effective plan for issuing documentation.

14. To reach out to potential candidates for recruitment as language professionals in more regions more cost-effectively, the Department had made greater use of social media and remote tools for outreach, training and testing in 2015. That had resulted in a noticeable increase in the number and diversity of qualified applicants admitted to sit the language competitive examinations. Information regarding the quality of interpretation and translation was also included in the report. No major policy or resource proposals were presented, as the Department sought to ensure that ongoing improvements and modernization projects were implemented within existing mandates and resources. In particular, it was committed to tackling the increasing volume of meetings and documentation within existing staff capacity and using available technology, in which connection it relied on the support of Member States. Lastly, the Department would submit a separate report on Secretariat-wide coordination of multilingualism under the related agenda item for the Assembly's consideration during the resumed part of the seventy-first session.

15. The Department was committed to preserving the high-quality services for which it was renowned and the core human resource capacity needed to support them, in order to consolidate its role as a key enabler of multilateral diplomacy. The efforts undertaken by in-house trainers and mentors to identify and train qualified professionals to work as regular, temporary and contractual language staff were critical in that regard. In addition to strengthening support for leveraging the full potential of innovative production technologies, the Department was exploring several initiatives designed to yield the additional capacity required to address its workload. Specifically, remote translation practicums aimed at students of translation schools and remote language examinations would be fully implemented in 2017-2018, with a view to increasing the accessibility of language services and training for candidates from underrepresented regions, particularly Africa and Latin America, and for persons with disabilities. In addition, to address the chronic shortage of Arabic interpreters on the roster, the Arabic Interpretation Section had implemented an in-house training programme that had allowed it to fill all current vacancies and compile a roster of candidates for future recruitment.

16. The Department strove to manage its operations strategically to meet the needs of Member States, bearing in mind the diminishing available resources and the increasing workload occasioned by new mandates, which affected all duty stations. In 2015, it had serviced 36,316 meetings across all duty stations, compared with 28,234 in 2013. While that increase was largely attributable to meetings held without interpretation, which were less resource-intensive, the growing number of side events and unplanned meetings had contributed significantly to the workload. The number of words processed in the six official

languages had also increased, especially in New York, where it had risen from some 117 million words in 2013 to almost 145 million in 2015. In Geneva, the Human Rights Council had held 156 meetings over its three sessions in 2015 and was expected to hold 153 meetings in 2016, compared with its entitlement of 100 meetings established at its first session. That amounted to a compression of 15.5 weeks of meetings into ten weeks. At the Council's first session in 2016 alone, 65 meetings with interpretation had been held in a period of four weeks, compared with its entitlement of 40 meetings over that time period.

17. The number of informal meetings of the General Assembly with full service requirements had increased from 23 at the fifty-fifth session to more than 350 at the seventieth session. It was furthermore expected that, at the seventy-first session, the volume of regular plenary meetings and intergovernmental processes receiving direct secretariat support from the Department would be similar to that of recent sessions. More than 30 facilitators had been appointed by the President of the Assembly at its seventieth session, and, in 2015-2016, ten new mandates relating to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had been added to the Department's work programme, including the establishment of the Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow-up and the multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, the inaugural sessions of which had been supported by the Department in 2016.

18. Efforts to improve and modernize working methods in the translation services by streamlining workflow, creating unified databases, harmonizing systems and promoting the use of computer-assisted translation tools had contributed to an increase in productivity of just under 10 per cent in New York, Geneva and Vienna between 2014 and 2015. With a view to strengthening the harmonization of policies, practices and standard operating procedures, the Department had established an internal steering group comprising senior management at all duty stations, which had provided a valuable forum for discussion between managers responsible for similar work areas and had resulted in the formulation of specific policy recommendations regarding processing of parliamentary documentation. The Department had also identified other areas that could benefit from such harmonization, including interpretation.

19. **Mr. Ruiz Massieu** (Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/71/549), said that, while utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities for the four main duty stations continued to be above 80 per cent, information on actual utilization of services versus existing meeting capacity in all headquarters locations should be included in all future reports on the pattern of conferences.

20. In view of the particular interest of the Advisory Committee and the broader United Nations membership in matters relating to the accessibility of conference services, he hoped that the Secretary-General's latest report relating to the realization of an inclusive and accessible United Nations for persons with disabilities (A/71/344 and A/71/344/Corr.1) and any related requirements would be submitted for the Fifth Committee's consideration.

21. He recommended approval of the proposal to transfer responsibility for the digitization of older United Nations documents to the Department of Public Information and to report future updates on the digitization project under the agenda item entitled "Questions relating to information." He also hoped that data on the actual workload of revisers, disaggregated by language section, would be provided to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the present report, as well as in future reports. Lastly, he highlighted the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to promote outreach programmes, particularly with a view to identifying qualified language staff from underrepresented regions through the use of social media and remote training and testing tools.

22. **Mr. Chamlongrasdr** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the draft resolution on the pattern of conferences would provide a solid basis for the Committee's negotiations on that agenda item. The Group attached great importance to the effective delivery of quality services in line with the principle of multilingualism. Issues such as the utilization of conference services, documentation and publication-related matters, translation and interpretation matters, as well as the calendar of

conferences and meetings were crucial to the effective and efficient functioning of the Organization and the deliberations of the intergovernmental and expert bodies.

23. The Group noted with appreciation that the overall utilization factor for all calendar bodies in the four duty stations had met the established benchmark of 80 per cent and encouraged those bodies whose utilization had fallen below the benchmark to continue their efforts to achieve optimal utilization. With respect to integrated global management, it welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts to establish and implement common performance indicators and single information technology systems at all duty stations and expected that lessons learned and best practices identified from those initiatives would be shared with regional commissions and other United Nations conference facilities. It also stressed the need for the timely and simultaneous issuance of required documentation in all official languages and to improve the quality of documentation, in order to facilitate the deliberations of intergovernmental and expert bodies, including the Fifth Committee. In that regard, the Group encouraged the interdepartmental task force on documentation to ensure that all challenges related to documentation were addressed in a timely manner.

24. He welcomed the funding made available by the State of Qatar for the digitization project, while noting that, in addition to the existing voluntary contributions, more than $4.6 million would be required to implement the project. In that regard, he expressed disappointment that the related proposal requested in paragraph 86 of General Assembly resolution 70/9 had not been presented and requested that it should be submitted without delay.

25. The Group valued the role of information and communications technology in facilitating the work of intergovernmental bodies. It therefore welcomed the ongoing initiatives undertaken by the Office of Information and Communications Technology and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, including the introduction of a portable Official Document System and the improvement of services at the Documentation Centre, and encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts in that regard in all duty stations and regional commissions. All Member States should be provided with documents without delays, restrictions or conditions.

26. The Group noted the near-completion of the capital master plan project and stressed the need to rectify the errors and omissions identified by Member States relating to physical and technological accessibilities. It looked forward to information on activities planned in that regard before the closure of the accounts for the capital master plan.

27. Further noting that a number of intergovernmental bodies, including the Fifth Committee, had extended their meetings beyond the time allocated in the calendar of conferences, he emphasized that Member States should address the challenges to the timely completion of their work by adopting a more efficient approach rather than by amending the calendar.

28. United Nations facilities must be used in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Organization, which promoted multilateralism. He therefore requested that measures should be taken to ensure that the nature and content of events, especially those conducted by non-governmental organizations, were approved before the use of the venue to ensure consistency with the principles of the Organization.

29. **Ms. Pilleri** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, stressed the importance of the timely and simultaneous issuance of all required documentation in all official languages and the need to ensure compliance with all related procedures and resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 70/247. Adherence to deadlines and word limits was especially critical to ensuring that documents were circulated to members in a predictable and timely manner. In that regard, innovative measures, such as workload sharing within the context of integrated global management, could help to expedite the translation of urgent documents, thereby strengthening the Fifth Committee's work and ensuring that conference services were utilized efficiently.

30. The members of the European Union had a strong interest in finding a pragmatic structural solution to the problems relating to the agenda for the second part of the resumed session. They were deeply concerned at the Fifth Committee's repeated inability to conclude its work within the limited time allocated, a situation that had been compounded by the current scheduling of the meetings of the Fifth Committee and of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, which was no longer viable and adversely affected the Fifth Committee's work. Costly and cumbersome workarounds had been required to accommodate negotiations held after business hours and without interpretation throughout the month of June and to carry out the necessary administrative actions before the start of the new budget period. Attention should also be paid to the impact of the uncertainty resulting from the delayed approval of budgets on United Nations staff whose livelihood depended on the relevant decisions. The proposal to extend the time allocated for the second part of the resumed session would allow the Fifth Committee to carry out its deliberations with the appropriate conference services and the valued support of the Secretariat. Lastly, her delegation would engage with all members of the United Nations in a spirit of openness, transparency and pragmatism to improve the calendar of conferences and meetings and ensure that all necessary measures were taken to achieve an outcome that benefited all parties.

31. **Ms. Iwatani** (Japan) emphasized the need to ensure the effective and efficient provision of conference services, while maintaining quality, to facilitate decision-making by Member States. She therefore welcomed the measures taken by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to increase the utilization rates of conference resources and facilities and to ensure the timely issuance of all documentation in all official languages.

32. While she appreciated the efforts made by the Department to process expeditiously the reports of the Advisory Committee in all official languages, she requested the Department and the Advisory Committee to provide assessments of the progress made in implementing paragraph 29 of General Assembly resolution 70/247, requesting the Secretary-General to transmit reports to the Advisory Committee no later than two weeks in advance of its scheduled consideration of items to ensure that the Advisory Committee would, in turn, provide its advice to the General Assembly no later than two weeks in advance of formal introduction of an item, subject to the exceptions provided for in that paragraph.

33. **Ms. Pollard** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management), responding to the comments made by the representative of Thailand, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management attached high priority to sharing its best policies and practices, including with regard to harmonization efforts and technology, with regional commissions. The Department organized the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP), with the participation of all United Nations system organizations and many other intergovernmental organizations, which provided a forum for strengthening coordination within the intergovernmental conference management network. It also held an annual coordination meeting for the senior conference managers at the four main United Nations duty stations and the regional commissions. It had worked actively with the regional commissions in 2016 and would continue to do so with a view to including them in its extended network. In particular, it looked forward to the 2017 coordination meeting, to be hosted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, as an opportunity to highlight the commissions' work. As far as the use of the Organization's facilities was concerned, events had been authorized that had later been deemed inappropriate; consequently, requests to hold events on United Nations premises were being screened more rigorously and all requesters, particularly permanent missions hosting events on behalf of non-governmental organizations, were required to comply with a checklist of conditions and provide assurances of the appropriate nature of the activity in question.

34. Despite the progress made, the timely and simultaneous issuance of documentation continued to present a challenge. Bearing in mind the provisions of General Assembly resolution 70/247, the Department worked closely with the Advisory Committee, the Fifth Committee and author departments to establish targets, enforce word limits and negotiate waivers authorizing departures from mandated word limits. In planning its

staff capacity in line with the Fifth Committee's documentation needs, the Department took into account available capacity at other duty stations as part of its integrated approach. However, there was little room for flexibility in that regard, as New York and Geneva alone accounted for 90 per cent of the conference management workload, and the peaks and valleys in the workload for the two duty stations tended to coincide. The Department was nevertheless working to strengthen its document production planning, including by following up proactively with author departments to avoid delays.

35. While the Department worked closely with the Advisory Committee and the Secretariat to stay informed of the status of preparation of the Advisory Committee's reports and ensure the availability of adequate capacity to process them in a timely manner, she emphasized that the Department was not in a position to instruct an independent body, such as the Advisory Committee, to reduce the word count of its reports.

36. **Mr. Ruiz Massieu** (Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), responding to the representative of Japan, said that the Advisory Committee would assess the impact of the timing of receipt of the Secretary-General's reports on the timeliness of its own reports, as well as the impact of other relevant factors, such as the need to respond to members' queries and the complexity of the issue under discussion. The Advisory Committee was also exploring ways to ensure that reports were received well before the time of consideration. In particular, under the agenda item entitled "Human resources management," it had proposed rearranging its consideration of Secretariat reports to ensure that the Assembly received the Advisory Committee's reports well in advance of its scheduled consideration of the relevant items.

37. **Mr. Kisoka** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation had participated extensively in the discussion of the proposal to extend the second part of the resumed session and considered that the challenges faced in that regard should be addressed by Member States themselves. It was unfair for delegations to prolong the session while complaining about the inadequacy of the time allotted and attempting to circumvent established procedures by referring the matter directly to the President of the General Assembly. Member States must bear the financial burden resulting from structural adjustments to the Fifth Committee's current practices, while understanding that the Committee's deliberations could not extend beyond the calendar year.

Agenda item 139: Human resources management (*continued*) (A/71/186, A/71/257, A/71/258, A/71/323, A/71/323/Add.1, A/71/323/Add.2, A/71/334, A/71/360, A/71/360/Add.1, A/71/393, A/71/393/Add.1 and A/71/557)

38. **Mr. Takasu** (Under-Secretary-General for Management) said that the General Assembly, at its seventieth session, had decided not to consider the reports on human resources management submitted to it by the Secretary-General at its sixty-ninth and seventieth sessions but to consider instead new and/or updated reports at the current session. Introducing the overview report on human resources management reform (A/71/323), he said that the report focused on reforms that had been implemented since the sixty-third session of the Assembly or were in the process of implementation. It highlighted the continued progress made under the Secretary-General's "Investing in people" initiative (A/61/255) and presented his views on the way forward to achieve a more global, dynamic, adaptable and engaged workforce.

39. With a view to improving the delivery of mandates conferred by the General Assembly relating to human resources management, the Secretary-General had put forward a number of key proposals for the Assembly's consideration and endorsement, including the reduction of the 60-day standard posting period for position-specific job openings for non-field recruitment to 30 days for positions in the Professional and higher categories; and the implementation of changes to the performance management system in two phases.

40. With respect to gender balance, as at 30 June 2016, women constituted 34.8 per cent of staff overall and 42.6 per cent in the Professional and higher categories. Despite the Secretariat's efforts, significant gaps still remained at the senior leadership level, where women accounted for only 29 per cent of staff at the D-2 level, 31 per cent at the D-1 level and 34 per cent at the P-5 level. The Secretary-General had therefore

developed a holistic Secretariat-wide strategy for achieving gender equality at all professional levels by 2030, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5.

41. The Secretariat continued its efforts to improve geographical representation and to attract external talent through outreach to unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, career fairs and increased use of digital platforms, including social media. In the future, the Office of Human Resources Management planned to align outreach activities more closely with organizational priorities and mandates by partnering closely with other departments and offices to develop strategies to meet their talent needs, with a particular focus on improving geographical representation and achieving gender parity.

42. While the numerous General Assembly mandates and oversight body recommendations in recent years on the topic of human resources management provided useful guidance on continued reform, various recent initiatives had underscored the need for a more global, holistic and integrated approach. The report therefore signalled the Secretary-General's intention to present to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session a more integrated human resources management framework for the Secretariat, covering three areas: managing talent, delivering human resources services and supporting the shaping of the organizational culture.

43. Introducing the Secretary-General's report on mobility (A/71/323/Add.1), he said that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/265, the new staff selection and managed mobility system had been launched in January 2016, beginning with the Political, Peace and Humanitarian Network (POLNET). Implementation of the system in the second job network — the Information and Telecommunication Technology Network (ITECNET) — would follow in January 2017. The report provided an update, preliminary data and lessons learned from the implementation of the first semi-annual managed mobility and vacancy exercises.

44. Introducing the Secretary-General's report on assessment of the system of desirable ranges (A/71/323/Add.2), he said that the report presented a review of the current system and requested the General Assembly to approve the recommended changes and give further guidance, as appropriate.

45. The Secretary-General's report on the composition of the Secretariat: gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors (A/71/360/Add.1) presented a demographic overview of the staff of the Secretariat as at 30 June 2016 and the engagement of the categories of staff listed during the biennium 2014-2015. In his report on the composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics (A/71/360), the Secretary-General, with a view to addressing the need for greater trends analysis highlighted by the Advisory Committee in previous years, invited the General Assembly to endorse the recommendation that the reporting period of future composition reports should be changed to run from January to December instead of July to June, so as to allow sufficient time for data analysis.

46. Lastly, he drew the Committee's attention to the Secretary-General's report on amendments to the Staff Regulations and Rules (A/71/258), which set out the amendments necessitated by the new common system compensation package, including the amended Staff Rules promulgated provisionally on 1 July 2016 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/244, and the new managed mobility framework approved by the Assembly in its resolution 68/265. It was imperative for the Assembly to approve the amendments to the Staff Regulations and take note of the amendments to the Staff Rules, as appropriate, at the current session, so as to give the Secretariat a formal legal basis for action.

47. The General Assembly had not adopted a comprehensive resolution on human resources management since its sixty-seventh session. Reform was a continuous and dynamic process that required sustained commitment and leadership from Member States. He therefore hoped that the General Assembly would take a favourable view of the Secretary-General's reports and proposals, which were interconnected and required implementation as a whole.

48. **Ms. Armstrong** (Director, Ethics Office), introducing the Secretary-General's report on the activities of the Ethics Office (A/71/334), said that, since its establishment 10 years previously, the Ethics Office had responded to 7,217 requests for services, detected and managed 1,256 conflict-of-interest matters through the financial disclosure programme,

and completed preliminary reviews of 153 claims for protection against retaliation, 21 of which had been found to be prima facie cases in which the protected activity was determined to be a contributing factor in causing the alleged retaliation or threat of retaliation; of those cases, five had been found to involve retaliation. Those results appeared to correspond with those of comparable organizations.

49. The Ethics Office continued to assist the Secretary-General, in an independent capacity, to enhance the Organization's culture of ethics, transparency and accountability. The main initiatives included confidential ethics advice and guidance; the financial disclosure programme; the review of claims for protection against retaliation for specific protected activities; outreach, training and briefings with other offices and departments; and policy support, such as participation in the Department of Management working group on the Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Framework of the United Nations Secretariat.

50. Of the 1,124 requests for services received during the 2015-2016 reporting period, requests for confidential ethics advice had accounted for the largest number, at 622, which was indicative of staff commitment to ethics and integrity. The Office also continued to provide advice, upon request, on due diligence, reputational risk, and best practices in anti-corruption programmes in procurement.

51. The aim of the financial disclosure programme was to protect the Organization's integrity and enhance public trust by detecting, managing and preventing personal conflicts of interest. In the 2015 filing cycle, the programme had achieved an overall submission rate of 99 per cent, and the rate for the United Nations Secretariat had been 100 per cent. During the reporting cycle, the Ethics Office had continued to facilitate the interdepartmental working group's discussion on improvements to the programme's regulatory framework and had worked with the Office of Information and Communications Technology to develop a new and more robust information technology platform for the programme.

52. During the reporting period, the Office had initiated preliminary reviews of 23 claims of retaliation and had determined that six were prima facie cases. The ad hoc working group set up by the Staff-Management Committee to propose a revised policy for protection against retaliation for reporting potential misconduct was continuing its deliberations, with continued technical input from the Office.

53. During the reporting period, the Office had delivered 122 briefing sessions and its website had received 140,000 views. It had also endeavoured to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of its outreach initiatives by combining nearby locations during its missions. It had monitored the roll-out of the 2015 Leadership Dialogue, "Fulfilling our mission: taking individual responsibility", and, in collaboration with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the Department of Management, had developed the 2016 Leadership Dialogue, "Fraud awareness and prevention: how do I fit in?", which would facilitate discussions on the different mechanisms for deterring, detecting, preventing and reporting allegations of fraud and corruption and raise awareness of the new Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Framework of the United Nations Secretariat (ST/IC/2016/25).

54. During the reporting period, the Office had proactively advocated for and assisted in conducting pre-appointment reviews of potential conflicts of interest for senior leadership positions. It had also contributed to policy coherence in the United Nations system by chairing the monthly meetings of the Ethics Panel and had participated in the annual meeting of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations.

55. By engaging directly with staff, management and other stakeholders on United Nations values and promoting adherence to the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, the Ethics Office served as a support to the Secretary-General and Member States. The General Assembly was requested to take note of the Secretary-General's report, including his intention to adjust the annual reporting cycle from the mid-year time frame (1 August to 31 July) to the calendar year (1 January to 31 December), while fully adhering to the requirement to report annually.

56. **Mr. Ruiz Massieu** (Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/71/557), said that the overview report on human resources management reform presented a clearer assessment of the human resources management challenges facing the

Organization as well as a strategic and integrated approach to addressing them. The Advisory Committee supported the intention of the Secretary-General to submit a detailed proposal on the evolving human resources framework at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly and was of the view that the framework should reflect a comprehensive impact assessment of all related initiatives undertaken over the past decade and should address long-standing challenges that had been repeatedly discussed by the Advisory Committee in its reports.

57. The Advisory Committee recommended the approval of the Secretary-General's proposal to reduce the standard posting period for position-specific job openings for the Professional and higher categories to 30 days, including for those that were part of the semi-annual staffing exercises under the new mobility framework. The Advisory Committee also recommended approval of the proposal to phase out by December 2018 the legacy rosters that had been in place before the introduction of the young professionals programme and the proposed extension of the period for which successful candidates could remain on the roster for the programme. The proposal to increase the permissible earnings of retired former United Nations staff members would likely lead to the more frequent engagement of retirees, a practice that ran contrary to efforts to improve workforce planning and rejuvenate the Secretariat.

58. The Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to further analyse the impact of the proposed elimination of the examination requirement for staff in the General Service and related categories to be eligible to move to the Professional category. On the proposal to lift the recruitment restrictions imposed pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/226, the Advisory Committee saw merit in efforts to level the playing field between internal and external applicants for vacancies in the Secretariat. However, before recommending endorsement of the proposal, the Advisory Committee recommended further analysis of the wider implications of lifting the existing restrictions. The Advisory Committee was not convinced that a thorough analysis of the potential costs and benefits of the proposal to extend the duration of temporary duty assignments had been undertaken. It therefore recommended that the necessary additional analysis should be completed and that, if substantiated, the proposal should be resubmitted for the Assembly's consideration.

59. With regard to the new staff selection and managed mobility system, the findings set out in the Secretary-General's report reflected very limited experience, with low levels of placement resulting from the first managed mobility exercise in POLNET and the details of the vacancies filled under the new system not yet reported. The findings and lessons learned were also very preliminary in nature. Therefore, the Advisory Committee was not in a position to recommend approval of the proposal to allow vacant positions to be included in the managed mobility exercise. It also stressed the importance of agreeing on a viable comparative baseline against which future mobility trends could be measured. In view of the difficulties in obtaining accurate and consistent baseline data, the Advisory Committee intended to request the Board of Auditors to verify all data reported on the numbers of geographic moves and their costs.

60. Concerning the system of desirable ranges, the Advisory Committee was of the view that, once again, the Secretary-General's proposed adjustments to the lower and upper limits of the ranges did not respond adequately to the General Assembly's request for a comprehensive review of the system.

61. The Advisory Committee noted that the period of consultations on the revised administrative instruction on disciplinary matters and related investigations had been very lengthy and therefore recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to finalize the instruction no later than 31 December 2016. Similarly, in its review of the activities of the Ethics Office, the Advisory Committee highlighted the fact that the revised policy for protection against retaliation had now been under development for more than two years and recommended that the revised policy should be finalized by the end of 2016.

62. Concerning the proposed amendments to the Staff Regulations and Rules relating to the implementation of the changes to the compensation package, the Advisory Committee reaffirmed the general principle that proposals to amend the Staff Regulations and

Rules must follow the decisions of the General Assembly.

63. The Advisory Committee concurred with the proposals to change the reporting cycles for the reports on the composition of the Secretariat and on the activities of the Ethics Office. Furthermore, consideration should be given to realigning and harmonizing the issuance of all human resources-related reports, including the annual report on the system of administration of justice, so that the Advisory Committee could consider them earlier in the year and the General Assembly could then advance its own consideration of them. Those changes should be seen in the larger context of efforts to rationalize the General Assembly's programme of work.

64. The delays in the issuance of the annual financial statements and the related reports of the Board of Auditors had prevented the Advisory Committee from considering those reports at the beginning of its fall session, as it usually did. He understood that the Fifth Committee's programme of work had also been affected as a result. The Advisory Committee had attempted to rearrange its consideration of items so that the Assembly was able to take up other agenda items earlier; for example, the report currently before the Committee was being introduced three weeks earlier than the Advisory Committee's report on the same subject two years previously. The Advisory Committee would continue its efforts to issue its reports in a timely fashion.

65. **Mr. Sukayri** (Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on succession planning in the United Nations system organizations (A/71/393), said that the objectives of the system-wide review conducted by JIU were to follow up and assess the progress made in developing a framework for a succession planning strategy and implementing relevant policies; to identify succession planning challenges and propose solutions; to identify and disseminate best/good practices; and to propose benchmarks for succession planning. The review had revealed that succession planning, though important, was not a priority in any United Nations system organization. However, the alarming demographics in most of the organizations across the system made it imperative for them to expedite succession planning so as to prevent potential loss of institutional memory and interruption of knowledge transfer and business continuity in leadership positions and other crucial functions.

66. The United Nations system organizations had not yet adopted any definition of succession planning, either at the organizational level or system-wide, and none had a formal succession planning process in place. Hence, the review had mapped the elements of the existing informal processes that were in line with the framework proposed in 2009 by the secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), in response to a recommendation made by JIU in 2007. Specifically, the review had assessed the progress made in the system-wide discussions on succession planning that had been initiated in 2009 within the Human Resources Network of the CEB High-level Committee on Management. Regrettably, the discussions had been discontinued, and as a result no progress had been made at the inter-agency level for more than six years. He therefore recommended that the members of the Network should consider the introduction of succession planning in 2017 as a new, indispensable component of the revised Framework for Human Resources Management of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). He also invited the members of the Human Resources Network to resume the dialogue and exchange of ideas and good practices within the Network.

67. Staff members were the most vital asset of the United Nations system organizations; the organizations must therefore recognize the importance of those who led and managed their staff and of those who discharged critical functions that had an impact on all staff. For the proper implementation of succession planning, he suggested the application of five benchmarks based on leading practices in the private and public sectors.

68. The legislative bodies of the United Nations system organizations should exercise their oversight role and examine the causes for the lack of, and/or the delay in, the introduction of formal succession planning, including the adequacy of current funding; and request the executive heads of the organizations to develop formal succession planning without further delay, by the end of 2017. The executive heads of the organizations should take specific action to ensure that

their human resources management offices adopted the benchmarks set out in the report with a view to ensuring that their organizations had a sound succession planning process, and should report on the progress made to their legislative bodies; and to ensure that those offices developed and implemented appropriate frameworks for succession planning strategies and devised appropriate guidelines on the succession planning process without further delay, by the end of 2017. Lastly, the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of CEB, should ensure that succession planning was reinstated as a main agenda item of the Human Resources Network of the High-level Committee on Management and was given serious consideration at the Network's future meetings.

69. **Mr. Herman** (United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination), introducing the note by the Secretary-General transmitting his comments and those of CEB on the JIU report (A/71/393/Add.1), said that the organizations of the United Nations system agreed that succession planning was an important component of organizational management and therefore welcomed the report, which they found informative and useful. They particularly appreciated the comprehensive nature of the report, which illuminated the current strategies, policies and practices in place across the United Nations system. Organizations supported the report's findings, though not without some additional comment. Some noted that the full implementation of succession planning might be inhibited by existing rules and regulations, since consultations with governing bodies might be required, and that it might also prove challenging at times of significant change, such as during strategic realignments or reprioritization.

70. Organizations supported recommendation 2, which called for the development and implementation of frameworks for succession planning strategies, but they noted that additional resources would almost certainly be required, especially in the light of the ambitious time frame proposed, and suggested that informal activities could be pursued as an interim measure. With regard to recommendation 3, organizations recognized the value of the benchmarks set out in the report, but some felt that further analysis was needed in order to understand better their resource implications before proceeding with full implementation.

71. **The Chair**, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 35/213, invited a representative of the staff of the United Nations Secretariat to make a statement.

72. **Mr. Richards** (Designated representative of the staff unions of the United Nations), speaking on behalf of the staff of the Secretariat and of the funds and programmes, said that the staff unions supported the proposal to allow staff members in the General Service and related categories to apply for P-1, P-2 and P-3 positions that were not earmarked for the young professionals programme. That would bring the United Nations Secretariat into line with the agencies, funds and programmes. General Service staff were currently penalized in comparison with external candidates when applying for Professional posts as they were excluded regardless of their qualifications or experience, and the route offered by the G-to-P examination was extremely restrictive. Unlike in the past, many General Service staff now had master's degrees and were regularly asked to take on Professional-level assignments.

73. The staff unions were firmly opposed to raising the earnings limit for retired staff members in receipt of pension benefits to the monetary equivalent of up to 125 working days per calendar year at the level at which the individual had separated from service, especially in the light of the excellent JIU report on succession planning. The current limit of $22,000 restricted the practice of "double-dipping" and minimized the rehiring of retirees at the expense of current or new staff. Furthermore, one reason that the mandatory age of separation had been raised to 65 had been to cut back on the rehiring of retirees.

74. The staff unions did not support the proposal to eliminate the six-month break in service for temporary staff moving to fixed-term appointments on the same post in peace and field operations, as it would mainstream recruitment to career positions via temporary appointments — in other words, via the back door — and would also disadvantage external candidates. That concern was all the more pressing because vacancies were now advertised only twice a year instead of when they became available, and temporary job openings were increasingly being used to fill the gaps. Vacancies should not be blocked by temporary employees who then stayed on.

75. The staff unions firmly disagreed with the proposal for vacant positions at B, C, D and E duty

stations to be included in a managed mobility exercise. In most cases, mobility was intended to take place through the vacancy track, which meant that staff could apply, within their post incumbency period, for posts of their choosing, including posts at higher levels. Under the managed mobility system, those still in their posts at the end of their incumbency period would be laterally assigned to a new post that might not be of their choosing, which would serve as an incentive to move in good time through the vacancy track. The proposal would make it difficult for staff to apply for new posts, eliminate opportunities for promotion to positions in the field and severely limit opportunities for external candidates. In any event, the managed mobility system should not be reviewed until it had been in operation in POLNET for a full year. The staff unions also had concerns about the use of general cognitive testing: it unduly favoured native English speakers and the questions in the situational reasoning component were unclear and United-States-centric.

76. The staff unions disagreed with the amendment to staff rule 9.9, under which accrued annual leave would not be paid to staff members who were dismissed for sexual exploitation or abuse. While heinous acts outside the workplace could be cause for dismissal, the staff unions and some members of management had legal concerns about the organization's charging staff a deferred salary that they had already contractually earned because of an act that had no financial implications for the Organization. Such a measure was also arbitrary, as different staff would have different levels of accumulated leave. The staff unions also disagreed with the amendment to staff rule 3.6, under which the determination of the dependency of a spouse should be made on the basis of all spousal income, including pensions and other retirement-related income. The report stated that that change had been recommended by ICSC, which was not the case.

77. The global service delivery model was based on the assumption that Umoja worked, whereas in fact it was still struggling, despite its $1 billion price tag, and some colleagues were still waiting months to receive benefits and pay. Once Umoja was stabilized, there would be an opportunity to study further the benefits it might bring. Currently there was too little data to make a clear case. Furthermore, the predecessor of the global service delivery model — the Regional Service Centre at Entebbe — had a poor reputation for service delivery.

78. No evidence had been put forward of the productivity benefits of flexible workplace in the United Nations. On the contrary, staff reported that constant interruptions and distractions hampered productivity, and, as some delegations had pointed out, since salaries accounted for 75 per cent of total costs, there was a strong risk that productivity losses would outweigh rental gains. Some staff used the same desk every day, which demonstrated the pointlessness of a cosmetic exercise on which Member States were now being asked to spend $66 million. At that price, the only gains would be for the furniture company that secured the contract.

79. The staff unions were concerned that the Organization wished to revise its policy on whistle-blower protection by reducing the scope of what constituted protected activities: protection would be available only to staff reporting major breaches of the Charter or other rules, not those reporting minor breaches. As it was not clear what constituted a major or a minor breach or why a distinction was being made, staff would probably report nothing at all, which would undermine the policy's objective.

80. A number of actions taken by representatives of the Secretary-General had led to a marked decline in staff-management relations. The staff unions requested the General Assembly to recommend that the Secretary-General should re-establish meaningful staff-management dialogue.

81. Lastly, the United Nations was one of the few international organizations that did not provide stipends to interns, which disadvantaged those from developing countries. As the internship programme was a useful means of attracting talent from non-traditional backgrounds and increasing geographical diversity in the Organization, the staff unions reiterated their call for the Secretary-General to prepare a report on the implications of providing stipends to interns at the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.